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MAM'SELLE DELPHINE

BY
HARRY STILLWELL EDWARDS

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Dedication

"It is not incumbent upon thee to finish the work; but thou must not therefore cease from striving diligently."

—THE TALMUD

TO a little Georgia working girl, who at home by day and by night fought through the great war with courage and devotion and became in the end "a casualty", this Christmas story is dedicated, and given to help her carry on. Her battle is now with humanity's dread enemy, the White Plague, and it is the Author's belief that the generous men and superb women of the South, through purchase of the story, will arm her with the means necessary to fight her way back to health.

The book is hers; its message theirs, the end is with God.

THE AUTHOR

GROVE PARK INN
ASHEVILLE, N. C.

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Mam'selle Delphine

RENDERED from the French into English the inscription carved over the quaint double gateway was:

> "Stranger, they who rest within these walls, God has sanctified by the touch of his angel Death. Pass not His sentinel if it so be ye harbor aught of malice, lust, resentment or envy; for these be the world's four curses and this is holy ground."

I copied it into my note book. But the sentinel!

The word above was written **vidette.** Beyond the gate were roses and green widespreading trees, the white of giant magnolia blooms and of many sepulchres. And somewhere the Southern thrush intensified the silence with his rapturous song, but of sentinel, guard or watchman there was none; only a cross of stone standing between the two entrances.

This, then, was the sentinel. Besides, there is a Spanish proverb which reads, "It is a reckless man that will bear a curse past a cross." Well, I am a just man, I hope, and tho my religion is of the subconscious, laid up for and in me by many good men and women long dead, it had sufficed to ward off the curses. I bore no malice or resentment. I envied no man. I

was pure in my desires. Naught remained but to salute the world's undying sentinel as all good men must; and so I bent the knee with a childish prayer on my lips.

The sentinel replied, "peace be with you!" in words carved at the foot of the cross, so small only the kneeling might notice.

And thus I entered among those whom God had sanctified by touch of his angel Death; and peace descended on me; the peace not alone of quietude but of loveliness:—slender monuments rising from piled up flowers; sepulchres softened by the wizardry of moss and lichen: slabs sunk in the verdure of the soil; here a cross and there a crown; and dreamless angels that brooded above the dreamless dead or pointed a hand to Heaven as their wings unfolded.

Roses there were by every pathway; and a myriad of birds, butterflies and bees flashed across the vistas or balanced in the sunlight. And over the sod and stones the ivy ran to climb the trees, and offer their streamers to the vagrant zephyrs. Peace? Life and the world were behind!

But presently as I wandered, steeping sense and soul in beauty, I met a new note,—a woman's wordless song, a lullaby; and came where one knelt, digging in the soil. The face she lifted as my shadow crossed her hand was serenely lovely and her voice, as she bade me good morning, was full of tones that lingered from her melody.

" 'Tis the grave of Mam'selle Delphine," she said, simply, seeing that I had removed my hat and paused to gaze on the slab set as a jewel in a frame of jade. "She was my friend. I am planting the iris,—her flower." I noticed then that the marble bore no legend or date,—just the name "Mam'selle Delphine."

"Monsieur will rest? The days are yet warm," she added, seeing my interest. I took the seat she pointed out, an antique iron settee, and thanked her. " 'Tis the fleur-de-lys," she continued, holding up a bulb. "Mam'selle's ring bore the flower and there was a picture on her wall—a banner and a shield."

"But, is it not unusual?—Just a name?—" The woman shook her head vigorously. She had all the expressive gestures of the French and many of the pretty tricks of pose and of feature that characterize the best of the Creoles, only it was evident from her simplicity and freedom that she was not of these. But it was soon equally evident that her refinement was perfect.

"She would have it so, Monsieur;—it was her will. And one dares not disobey the dying. But it was like her,—of a simplicity, perfect. No boasting, no display,—just an elegance!"

"You knew her well, then."

"Ah, did I not! None better. She was my **bonne amie.** But for her,—" she paused, a slight flush on the dark oval face, her eyes cast down. Presently she looked up, and the light danced in them.

"Monsieur is—a traveller? No? An artist perhaps." She glanced at my rather large note book.

"A traveller—yes. An artist—no. But sometimes a maker of little books."

"Ah! And would Monsieur make a book about Mam'selle? But no! There is too much; —and too little. And who knows?"

"You might tell me what she was like,—if you mind not to talk to a stranger. See—" and I smiled my best smile,—"my hair is quite gray!" She laughed softly, looking up from her task without lifting her head, and a shy little smile bent the perfect mouth.

"Ah yes; but it is quite beautiful, Monsieur, the gray hair. But not so beautiful as Mam'selle's nor so much. She was like this, Monsieur,—little, like a child woman; and wrinkled like a fairy grown old. But her eyes! Ah, the light was there,—the soul light. Dr. Marshall says some souls live in the back of the heads of people; and some in their poor stomachs and their light is feeble in the eyes, like candles behind the curtains. And some live in the front of their heads and look always from the two windows there; and the light in these windows, it is radiant. It was so with Mam'selle. Believe me, Monsieur, when her soul went back to the good God, the light died in her eyes as altar candles blown out by a breeze. And her voice! Listen?" She made a gesture to include the whole environment. The blended sounds came to us filtered through screens of

moss and ivy and was as the murmur of a far-off waterfall, deepened and lightened as the winds waxed or waned. "It was like that;—a part of God's unending music, and peace and gentleness. You ask of her family",—again the nod and confiding smile. "Well, there was the tiny folding table of mahogany, the two worn rockers, the bed between high-up carved posts, the marble top washstand, the lustre gone,—all born before Mam'selle and full of the scars of many journeys. These were her family, Monsieur; her poor relations, she called them. Indeed, but believe me, Monsieur, there was something of her in each,—something that whispered her name, if you listened. A faded rug or so, and lace curtains, well darned,—these and a hundred little things that filled the right spot,— these were all! But all were of a perfection in their neatness. Monsieur," and the wise little face sought mine but half assured, "might it not be that the mystery of a woman's room is always the woman herself? But I put it badly. This;—when Mam'selle's room was empty, she was still there. But if another came when the room was empty Mam'selle was not there."

"The soul, perhaps! who knows?"

"Yes, that is it. The soul of Mam'selle filled her room to overflowing. It was always there, something intimate, that clung and remained where her hands had touched or her feet had pressed. Dr. Marshall said the whole scene had been removed from over in the

Colonial section, and she wore it as a setting. And it was true, though the way had been longer for poor Mam'selle than across the city. Did I reveal to you the room was in the poorest quarter? No? Well, it was. God, how forlorn that street!" She shivered over a memory.

"Could you not tell me the story of Mam'selle Delphine?"

"I? No! No! No! She taught me by night and by day. She was my good friend. But no one is good enough to have known all of Mam'selle!"

"You might tell me something of it?" The young woman smiled and shook her head. But presently she lifted her face with the birdlike quickness that was evidently a characteristic,—the instantaneous response to a thought.

"I may indeed tell you one thing, Monsieur, to reveal her goodness. Be careful to remember I received it from her. It was a memorable time,—the Christmas eve when snow fell and lay on the ground. A very wicked woman lay in the room next to Mam'selle's,—just a bed was there and one poor chair. No fire, no cover, no light, no food! The wretched woman's last money had gone for this shelter of one week for herself and the helpless baby. I say wicked, Monsieur, because she had not waited to be a bride, and her lover had been hurried away to the Philippines with his company before the day she set had come. But yet she was a girl only, and the home back in Bayou Teche was closed to her. Let the good God judge. But if wicked, she was still brave, and could sew the delicate

stitches of all her people. Only, the cold had stiffened her fingers and the baby could only be warmed against her body, for the wraps, she had none! Mam'selle, who worshipped purity and cleanliness and whose room was as a shrine, told me that for hours she resisted the wailing of the babe heard through the thin wall of lathe and paper, as it rose and fell with the little one's strength. And she resisted, too, the little mother's voice that mingled with baby's wail, and went and stood by the window looking down into the poor street, now for the first time in the lives of children grown to be men and women, white and pure with the baptism of the snow. Here and there a man hurried along dreaming of the coming day, the birthday of the dear Christ-child at the foot of the centuries. And from other quarters less poor echoed the shrilling of horns and the sharp staccato of the big crackers. Snow! Visions came to Mam'-selle of her childhood in a grandmother's Virginia home. Faces, then hidden away from all but memory, rose between dear Mam'selle's shining eyes and the soft shadows without. And voices! The prattle of children, the carols and the hushabyes of motherhood. These last continued when the visions and the other voices faded back into the past and she turned her brave eyes again into the prisonhouse of her old age. Ah, but you should have heard Mam'-selle tell it. She realized then that it was a real mother, and not her own slave mammy, crooning the sweet Southern song of childhood over

a restless babe. It was this had driven her to the window, resisting. Now it drew her back. She lifted from her table the worn Bible and her glasses set in the slender gold. It was Mam'selle's daily habit, Monsieur, to take her guidance from the page that offered when her gentle spirit was oppressed; and the Book had never failed her. Had she been of the woods and fields, she would, in such hours, have come here into the large silences to listen. But the page was her only refuge; and she told me that these lines met her gaze:

> "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

"You may believe, Monsieur, she closed the book reverently and passed out into the carpetless hall without hesitating and entered to the wretched woman."

"In the room, poorer, much poorer than hers, the little girl-woman sat with head bowed above the child in her lap. Her mother-song hushed as Mam'selle entered. The face lifted, Mam'selle told me, was tear-stained and haggard. Youth there was left, only in the full volume of shining black hair loosened around her head and in the yet clear complexion; but in the eyes and drawn features was a threat of that which comes with a cheerless age. Ah, but she had suffered! And the desolation of the woman overflowed her room."

" 'Is it ill?' Mam'selle's voice was of the gentlest! As the summer wind among the pines.

The hand she laid, not on the babe's head, but on the mother's, was as the same soft wind against a fevered cheek. The little mother could but nod and be dumb; but presently under the infinite caress of the hand, her story came;—certain garments, Monsieur, finished and ready for delivery, lay on the tumbled bed; she had planned to take them, child in arms, and collect the promised pay in time to supply her wants,—but now the child was ill. She thrust out her feet."

"'Will Madam please observe the wretched shoes?' Surely 'wretched' never served a better use! And outside was the snow. The shoes were fragments, only, tied on with cotton strips. The stockings, they were visible everywhere; and through them, the feet too."

"Here was the tragedy! The rest, which Mam'selle had guessed, and from which her clean soul had, all unknowing, shrunk, was as yet a guess only. The hand on the bended head continued in its slow caress."

"'The father?—Is he living?' Ah but Mam'selle knew how to be delicate!"

"'Yes, Madam!' said the poor girl. Then, after a pause, Mam'selle again:—"

"'Where?'"

"'In the Philippines, Madam!'"

"'Ah!' The hand pressed suddenly on the girl's head. And then: 'A soldier. And—you loved him?'"

"'Yes, oh! Yes!—But he was—taken away,—almost without warning. And—I lost him!'"

"'Could you not go home?—Now?'"

"'No!' The head moved in sudden brave defiance. And then, wearily, 'There is a second wife, Madam!' Again the sweet voice of Mam'selle:"

"'This father;—will he come back to you?'"

"'He has promised!' The little woman took from her bosom a letter worn and blurred and Mam'selle read it. The date was many months old, Monsieur."

"'He loves you,' said Mam'selle simply. 'He will return. I am sure he will. I have a kinsman there, in those Philippines. We shall find that little father, and he will bring the ring.' You see Mam'selle's eyes had seen the bare hand. Now she turned away and brought from her own room—what would you guess, Monsieur? Listen! Two nickels which she slipped into the hand of the young mother. Then seating herself she drew off her shoes—did good Mam'selle Delphine!"

"'Put on these and deliver your work and leave the baby with me until you get back! The money is for the cars,—it is too far for you to walk even if you had the time.' Mam'selle's shoes were poor but neat,—the worn shoes of gentility. The stockings she exposed were darned,—and Mam'selle's darning was art!"

"The poor young woman hesitated a moment. You may believe she was amazed and bewildered. But then with a great sob she made the exchange and gathered up her bundles."

" 'Thank you, Oh! thank you!' It was all she could utter, Monsieur, as she hurried away. Mam'selle, who remained, knew what was behind that sob, when the feeble hands of the child clutched blindly at her breast. It was both ill and starved. Tragedy? Ah, Monsieur! only the very poor know tragedy! And it's the mother knows it best!"

"Mam'selle said the moments passed slowly. The chill in the room increased and the little hands and feet in her lap grew colder. Smiling over a thought, some far-a-way dream she had buried, it may be, she carried it to her own room and her immaculate bed, and added a single lump of coal to the little handful in her tiny stove, for she must be careful of her store. Lulled by the atmosphere of serene peace into which it had come and by the familiar lullaby in the sweet voice of the dear woman bending above it, the child sank into a slumber that was almost a coma."

The speaker planted her last bulb. Now, she seated herself on the edge of the slab and as she continued her story her hand passed lightly and lovingly over the name carved there: a hand that bore on the third finger a slender band of gold.

"Then, Monsieur, poor Mam'selle had her bad quarter hour. It would be long before the mother could return; and what if she failed in

her mission? or if the stores were closed? It was now nearly ten o'clock and at twelve, even on Christmas eve, in this old city the store doors would be locked up. Her faded little purse held, now, but five coppers. How were her own needs to be supplied? Her bread and butter for next day were gone with the two nickels."

"Mam'selle left the last question unanswered. She left it to the good God. Returning to the empty room she tied the ragged shoes on her feet and passed down into the night and the snow. Brave? Ah Monsieur, is it wonderful that the sons of such women know how to die in battle? Around the corner were the thorofare and the drug store with its place of refreshment. Hurrying there, she placed her money and her glass on the marble and asked for milk. You may know it was not for herself. Mam'selle made a story of her visit to that store you would have liked to hear;—a little clerk in white, lifted a milk can from the icebox and shook it; "Aha!" he said, "Behold it is empty! I must go to the cellar!" Presto! and he swept her coppers into the safe harbor of his drawer. Something in Mam'selle's voice, or in her eyes checked his haste. Maybe it was a message. If it were, it reached him and held him there a moment. Mon Dieu! how much one moment may hold! Then the big round voice of the Manager boomed over the crowd a warning. This is what he said:"

" 'If you have any more tickets, Messieuers, —if you have any more, place them in the box! When the clock strikes the contest closes and the drawing begins!' "

"'Ha! one more!' shouted back the little clerk. And he seized a red printed slip: 'What is your name,—please?' he said to Mam'selle. 'Quick, Madam!' His pencil was poised,—'so.' Ah, the importance of these little men of business! They keep the wheels moving."

"'But—,' she began, puzzled and confused in such strange scenes. She looked this way and that, did Mam'selle."

"'It's a drawing, ma'am! Every five cent purchase obtains you a ticket that goes into the box! It's just a chance,' oh, he was a wise little one:—he did not wish her to hope and then suffer the disappointment,—'but it's a chance all the same! It's not a gamble,'—he meant lottery, Monsieur,—'it's a gift!—a Christmas gift from the store!' He was careful to explain because she was drawing away and doubt was in her face. There is a law against the lottery. Thus assured Mam'selle murmured her name, spelling it for him and smiling into his upturned face. Such a little gentleman!"

"At last the slip went into the box; and then the hour of ten rang on the city clocks."

"And now Mam'selle looked curiously about her. Half a life had passed, she told me, since she had last stood in a Christmas crowd. The store in which she found herself was full of the dear, home-loving people, nearly all men, on their Christmas fete, buying, raffling, jesting under the loosened rein that life, next week, would draw tight again. And as she gazed and stood there, a stranger to it all, the jolly, laugh-

ing face of the Manager rose above the general level of heads."

" 'Attend!' he said. 'The drawing will be of the simplest! Short and sweet like my wife!' For he will have his joke, Christmas or no Christmas. 'The young lady here will take her hands full of tickets from the box, after I have mixed them up thoroughly, and drop them back one by one, in sight of all, until but one remains! That ticket wins. Attend! We begin!' He plunged his hands into the tickets. Monsieur,—so and so!—stirring and kneading them with a vigor; and then a young girl, Mam'selle Celeste, the dream-child, was lifted to the counter and the box placed at her feet. As she stood there under a cluster of the electric lights, her short hair curling loosely around the brow and face of exquisite beauty, she seemed to Mam'selle a being from the other world. So, she thought, would Raphael look—standing at the right hand of God. It was a swift but a wonderful picture—just a flash, and a hush descended as it painted itself on the mind, like the sun paints in the camera. However the little drawing might result, each had received a gift. For it is no little thing when the good God paints an angel face in the mind. If you have the fever, the angel comes and not the devil. And the dreams!"

"It was at this moment, Monsieur, that unseen hands, or so it was whispered around many a fireside that Christmas eve, touched the girl and in view of all was the miracle. Her hair stirring in a little breeze, under the focus of the

many lights, became not as hair, at all, but as a tremulous halo that remained, when, standing straight, her eyes first on the vacancy and then on Mam'selle near the door, she began to drop the tickets from her full hands. A great music box, the prize of the drawing, gave out a melody. Someone had slipped in a record, —"Then You'll Remember Me." You have heard it, Monseur? Yes? Over the crowd and to the heart of Mam'selle came the song from the violin of a master borne on the uplift of a well touched harp. It came first as a shock to Mam'selle, then as a message from her youth. What a romance! A voice had sung the song for her beneath her boudoir window in the dim, dear old years, back in Virginia, the voice of a boy, who, soon after, went cheering into the eternal silence, under the guns of Gettysburg. Here was Mam'selle's one romance, never before breathed in memory, even, beyond the confines of her room, bared now in a public place! So it seemed to Mam'selle at first. But no! The music belonged to the crowd; the song was hers! The boy was singing to her! The meaning was for her alone! Ah, she understood now, Monsieur! it was his message at Christmas;— love had found a way across the long years and out of the great silence. For this had Mam'selle been drawn to the desolate room:—for this she had read the child's hunger,—had felt the little fingers on her breast,—for this she had given her last copper. God leads us surely, Monsieur. We must shut our eyes and trust. He had called her and she had come barefoot through the snow. Ah, you should have seen Mam'selle's face when her soul was at the window!"

"The words arose and flowered in her quick appreciation;—they did not sound. She taught me the whole song:

"When coldness or neglect shall dim
The lustre of thine eyes,
And deem it but a faded light
Within their depths that lies.
When hollow hearts shall wear a mask
'Twill break thine own to see,
In such a moment I but ask
That you'll remember me."

"**Remember him!** Remember **him!** Oh God!—Oh God! had she not forgotten all else?" The little woman pressed her hands to her eyes a moment and bowed her head. Presently the mobile face, lit with a smile, was lifted.

"You see, Monsieur, Mam'selle had never grown out of the girl she was when that farewell song ascended into her window. The young lover was with her through her full blooming womanhood and in her fading age, but **it was always the girl that met him, communed with him.** In the strange way of the spirit she took her guidance through him, and through him came her comfort. The good God spoke with the lips of the boy, and it was always his finger that pointed her verse in the Bible when she opened it in blind faith! For with her, Monsieur, though the marriage had not been recorded on earth, it had been in Heaven, and her soldier husband had never died. Ah! here was the secret of her serene bearing, her blind faith and obedience. And the smile with which she faced one world was just the reflected

glory of another. Coldness? She had never felt it. Neglect? She was not conscious of it. Neither had dimmed the lustre of the soft brown eyes. Their light would never fail. She thought that some day death might gently lower a curtain before them; that, or, some morn to its lonely home her spirit returning through the flower paths of her childhood, where it went in dreams, would find the sun had not lifted the curtain, and she would just keep on where the paths led."

"And the hearts? Ah, her own would never break. How could it? The dear Christ-child;—Raphael; the hero-lad,—her dream husband, standing ever in the moonlight beneath her window,—were, by the strange magic of love all blended in one. Monsieur, could the heart of any woman break when these were her lovers? Never! 'Remember me?' **Remember him!** He had been standing that night in the spring's last light snow; and she had dropped him her roses one by one, holding the last, the crimson, to her lips, dropping them as Mam'selle Celeste was dropping the painted slips. This was the picture in the mind of Mam'selle Delphine.

"Then the strong, booming voice again:"

" 'There are but two left, Messieurs,—but two! Attend! The young lady will drop one, —and the other wins! Hold on to your little Saint Josephs!' "

"Extending both hands—so, Monsieur,— Mam'selle Celeste suspended the slips, white and red, a moment, looked again into the face

of Mam'selle Delphine and released the white. Then with a pretty gesture, she pressed the red one to her lips and let it float down into the Manager's hand. Turning it he read:

' "Mam'selle Delphine!' "

"Mam'selle heard the name, but the song in her heart was still vibrant. She was listening back, not forward. Not so with the little man in the white duck, at this moment filling her glass with the milk. The name was very new in his memory. He stared a moment; and then after the fashion of youth that excites easily, his emotion leaped in shouts:"

" 'That's you, lady! That's you!' he said. Now, he had run around and was shaking her arm."

" 'What do you mean—?' said Mam'selle, indignant, pushing off his hands. The scene swam as consciousness of her surroundings returned and she found herself, she, Mam'selle Delphine, the centre of attention. Nothing like this notoriety had happened in all her long life."

" 'You've won the prize! It's yours!' they all cried out. The men nearest were regarding her with curiosity. Some, in the spirit of Christmas, offered felicitations. Frightened, she drew farther away, but before she could escape, the Manager was by her side explaining that the great music box was her property,—that, and the records. The last ticket placed in the box had won."

" 'But I,—why, what can I do with it?' she faltered. You see she was not of com-

merce. Ah, but then the last actor in this drama staged by the good God, entered on the scene. A quiet man he was, with the ease that comes of birth and success, whose glance had in its first flash read Mam'selle's helplessness and poverty in her dear little bare head and her half bared angel feet. He came quickly to her side.

" 'What,' he inquired of the Manager, 'is the selling price of the instrument?'

" 'That size,—and the records, seventy dollars. Ha!'

" 'Mam'selle Delphine,' he said, 'I am Doctor Marshall. I offer you seventy dollars for your prize. Do you wish to sell it?' He stretched forth his hand and steadied her, for she began to waver. The shock had been great, Mam'selle's lips moved, but he only caught the words, 'Oh, ye of little faith.' Just a whisper. He told me Mam'selle did not seem to see him; and truly she was looking on another scene, and her face was full of the beauty that is youth itself. Indeed, Monsieur, youth had for one moment flowered again for Mam'selle Delphine.'

" 'What is it, Mam'selle?' he said, waiting:"

" 'I was thinking of when Christ talked to them,' said Mam'selle,—don't you remember?' She touched his arm with her thin white hand. Mam'selle had forgotten that she did not know this new man standing so grave and polite by her side. He did not seem a stranger to her

when she saw the soft, dim light stealing into his eyes. Hers was the response of kind to kind. Now he was speaking again, because of a sudden he understood,—this grand, good man, our Doctor Marshall."

"'You are not strong,' he said,—'come, my car is at the door; if you are through with the shopping, let me take you home? Are there any packages?' He was gently urging her to the door as he spoke."

"'Ah yes! the milk! the milk! Quick,—I must go!' Believe me, Mam'selle was now in a panic! He took the milk and guided her into his car despite her protests.

And soon, above the babe they found crying in its hunger and loneliness, but quick to grow quiet with warmed milk, the Doctor heard the life story of Mam'selle Delphine told in little pieces. His perfect appreciation filled it in;—she was driftwood from that dear old South of song and story blown on strange shores. He knew of others, but none that appealed as she. Proud, Monsieur, with the pride of the truly fine, strong in the faith that cannot falter, she was living out her life, every new floodtide leaving her farther on the desolate sands. A grand nephew in the Philippines, her kinsman in the soul as well as in the blood, had offered to share with her his small salary, —enough to pay her room rent, but she would have none of it. Her delicate hands, invoking an art that was once a grace, and the little French and Spanish she taught, brought the little she needed; but no more."

"Mam'selle soon placed her masterful visitor. He had heard of 'her people' from his mother. And when a girl in Virginia she had known some Marshalls and there were Marshalls from way down South who used to come up to see them;—his grandfather? Ah! how small a world it is, after all, Monsieur! She herself had been a shuttlecock of fate. A Verginia bride had gone into the far South, to sleep, after a year, by her Creole husband, under the trailing moss of the live oaks. Yellow fever! The babe she left had gone back to the grandmother to remain till the dream of one and the life of the other went out. And then the girl, nursing her vision, her romance, her memories and her invisible children at a virgin breast drifted back to her father's people in the South and through long years into the present. 'Ah, Monsieur! 'tis well we have only the five senses; we touch life too close, sometimes, as it is!' "

"Mam'selle had been offered a home in many places and some offers she had accepted because she could give value for what she received. But again death would steal in; or business reverses; or marriages, and removals. One cannot stand still! The refuges for such as she? Well, Mam'selle could never quite gain her own consent. Just why, she was not able to say. She had been, in the sight of heaven, a hero's bride; she must not forget that. One cannot tell what is behind the curtain or how far back into life the dead may look. If she were in a refuge, she would feel **his** eyes upon her and his sadness."

"No, a soldier's wife must be brave! How could her spirit, grown weak and cowardly, mate with the spirit of her soldier? No, she must take to him the spirit of a brave girl, not that of a weak old woman. Monsieur knows that was the way to talk to Doctor Marshall. What gentleman fails to salute the dauntless woman!"

"But, Monsieur, when the tired mother returned, she found them bound up in their new friendship, and the baby in its snug harbor. It was not seriously ill, the Doctor assured her. And he would send medicine in the morning. Ah, but she was startled when he added that unless it had good nourishment and a month of nursing it might die."

"Again it was Mam'selle who brought back hope!"

" 'Look', she said, extending her hands full of money, 'seventy dollars! Is it not wonderful? Ah, we shall have a happy Christmas after all,—you and I and the baby!' " The young woman paused. Again her hands were pressed to her eyes. Again, the lifted face and radiant smile: " 'Many of them, perhaps,' said the Doctor, 'Many of them.' And then,—what would you think, Monsieur?—this: 'We have been talking it over, Mam'selle Delphine and I. In my hospital for children I have need for her. We shall,—let me think,—we shall make her 'mother' of the colony,—yes, I am sure we shall. We need just this atmosphere of home, —a delightful little room like this,—furniture and all, where the children may come and tell

their troubles and be petted and spoiled. Mam'selle,' he said with his wonderful smile, 'you wished to continue young? Yes? Well, the fountain of youth is youth itself. You shall bathe daily in the fountain of youth! And you'—he turned now to the other, considering: —and she, poor little sufferer, looked up at him eagerly, and then away from his searching eyes, —'You shall learn nursing,—if you will. You shall be our little sister;—sister of all who know sorrow and pain. Good night,—and a happy Christmas!' "

" 'I shall like that,—a chance to do,' said Mam'selle, her face shining as for the moment her hand lay in his."

" 'A chance to **undo!**—give me that!' said the little mother."

" 'Good', he said, touching her bowed head as he passed, 'good! I like that. You shall have your chance.' "

"Ah, but when he was gone, this mother, this little forsaken mother, knelt long with breast above and arms around the sleeping child, not hiding it now, but consecrating it with tears of a good woman,—its first baptism. Monsieur, this man, this holy man, this dear Mam'selle Delphine,—the angel woman,— saved a soul there and then with the beautiful name 'sister', and gave a little manchild his chance in life."

"But Mam'selle stood silent by the window while the clock rang in the new day, looking down into the snow with her bright eyes. The face she saw there, she told me long afterwards,

was that of the young martyr whose country called him away to sleep in an unknown grave. Through all the years a thought had repeated itself in Mam'selle's consciousness:—**if only it could have been!** if only life had given the brave boy to her arms, indeed and in truth!—If only she had been a bride, a wife, perhaps then the tragedy of her life might not have been written in loneliness! Oh, the vain dreams of motherhood! And oh! Monsieur, do the spirits of little children knock at the hearts of lonely women? I think they must, indeed. I wish you could have heard Mam'selle tell the rest. The other was watching; 'Mamselle', she said, 'it is time you slept. What shall I do?—my baby?—' "

" 'Your baby!' said Mam'selle, '**your** baby?' With hands, oh so strong of a sudden on the young mother's shoulders, she turned her gently toward the child: 'Not **your** baby, now, but ours! You are to sleep there by it!' "

" 'On your bed?' The eyes of the two women met. So much depended!"

" 'Why not? Are you not, now, my little sister?—my little sister?' Her dear lips lingered on the name and longer on the girl's brow. Then she turned quickly back to the window, while the other lay and waited. But not to sleep. Mam'selle was old and might need help. So she watched through half shut eyes. She saw Mam'selle, at length, sink to her knees and lift her face to the winter stars, and she heard her whispered prayer. It meant, that prayer, that all she had to give was

the sanctity, the purity of her room, and she had given it to the woman of the street and the soiled little one in the whiteness of her bed. For the first time she was in touch with the unclean."

"And then she came to her Bible and opened it and placing a finger blindly on a verse, read, half aloud in broken words:—'there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head,—and Jesus said, Let her alone—she hath done what she could.' "

"The young woman arose hurriedly and threw herself on her knees with her arms around the thin limbs of her new friend, crying:'

" 'If I could have found you sooner,—if I could have found you sooner, it might not have been!—but—the stain!—the stain!—" Ah, the dear Mam'selle, the saint on earth! Her voice was like the summer wind dying out in Bayou Teche—Wait, Monsieur, till you hear her words:—they came in whispers:"

" 'Listen—little sister,—**I am two women in one,—and one of them is you!** But the other stands firm! Look up, she will not fail you. We go from here to a place where there is suffering,—sometimes, death. We shall be of use. We shall do God's work! **We shall live for others!** Stretch out your hands to Him, my dear;—if they are stained the first kiss of a dying child will cleanse them! 'As ye have

done it unto the least of these, ye have done it unto me!' "

"Monsieur, it was the voice of Heaven! The other woman seized Mam'selle's hand:"

" 'Do you believe that? Do you?' she said. 'You are not just **saying** it? Can God turn the years back?—"

" 'Hush!' said Mam'selle, 'oh hush! Turn back the years? Why, the lines are **gone from your face!**—the bitterness,—the rebellion! And your eyes that were dim with sorrow are shining like twilight stars over Galilee! For you, God has already turned back the years!"

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